

# **Common Cold & Influenza**

Common colds are mild infections of the nose and throat, which are very common in young children (and in the adults who are around them). Many different viruses cause them. Usually the viral illness causes some combination of stuffy nose, runny nose, sore throat, cough, runny eyes, ear fluid and fever.

Influenza (aka, the flu) is also caused by a virus (e.g., influenza-A, influenza-B) and causes symptoms of fever, headache, congestion, cough, muscle ache and fatigue. Most people with influenza feel too ill to attend child care.

There are no medicines or treatments which prevent/cure the common cold, but there are many medicines, which claim to make the sufferer more comfortable. For type-A influenza there is a medication, which may be used to prevent or treat the disease in certain high-risk situations. Occasionally, the common cold or influenza can be complicated by a bacterial infection such as an ear infection, sinus infection, or pneumonia. These complications can be treated with appropriate antibiotics.

## **Who gets these diseases?**

Anyone can. Young children may be sick with these illnesses several times per year. As the number of persons in contact with a child increases, so does the likelihood of exposure to the common viruses that cause colds and the flu.

## **How are they spread?**

The viruses can only grow in live cells, but they can be transmitted from one person to another in respiratory secretions (i.e., saliva, airborne nose discharge, phlegm). Infected droplets may be scattered through sneezing or coughing or they may land on surfaces touched by other persons, who then touch their eyes, nose, or mouth.

Viral shedding into respiratory secretions is usually highest two to three days before a person develops symptoms of illness and then for three to five days after. Thus, by the time a child or staff member shows the symptoms of an illness, the virus has already spread.

## **How soon do symptoms appear?**

Symptoms appear as soon as 12-72 hours after exposure for the common cold and for influenza usually one to three days.

## **What is the treatment?**

Most health care providers suggest rest and plenty of fluids. There is a treatment for influenza-A the drug Amantadine - however, it is not usually used in a child care setting except for high-risk individuals. Occasionally, a decongestant or antihistamine medicine may be used. A healthcare provider to see if there is bacterial infection in addition to the viral infection should evaluate a child who has a high fever, persistent cough, or earache. Because of a possible association with Reye's Syndrome (i.e., vomiting, liver problems and coma), salicylate-containing products (i.e., aspirin) are not recommended for fever control if influenza is suspected.

## **How can the spread of these diseases be prevented?**

1. Children and staff should wash their hands after wiping/blowing noses.
2. Children and staff should learn to cough or sneeze toward the floor or to one side and should cover their mouths. If they sneeze or cough into a hand or tissue, they must properly dispose of the tissue and wash their hands.
3. Runny noses and eyes should be promptly wiped then wash hands.
4. Disposable towels/tissues should be used.
5. Toys that children put in their mouths and frequently used surfaces (e.g., tables) should be washed and disinfected at least once each day.
6. The child care facility should have fresh air and be aired out completely once a day, even in winter.
7. Vaccines are available to help fight against influenza and are recommended for child care providers. Although the vaccine is not routinely recommended for children it is recommended for children, in high-risk groups, age 6 months and over, who have certain chronic medical conditions that increase the risk of developing complications from influenza. Consult the Bureau of Disease Control or the child's physician for recommendations. The influenza vaccine is given annually in the autumn before the start of the flu season.

## **Who should be excluded?**

Children should be excluded if they have a fever or are unable to participate in general activities. Exclusion is of little benefit since viruses are likely to spread.

## **Reportable?**

No, influenza is not reportable, but please notify outbreaks to the Office of Community and Public Health Bureau of Communicable Disease Control.